

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 15, 2021
9:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Roger Holland, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 19

"An Act extending the special education service agency; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 19(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 8

Urging the Alaska delegation in Congress, the United States Department of the Interior, and the Governor to facilitate the completion of a land grant endowment to the University of Alaska.

- MOVED SJR 8 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 42

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to course credit for students; relating to annual reports regarding school district performance and school district employees; relating to school age eligibility; relating to funding for early education programs; establishing early education programs and a voluntary parent program; relating to the duties and powers of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to school operating fund reserves; relating to certification of teachers; relating to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission; relating to a virtual education consortium; establishing a reading

intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; establishing a teacher retention working group; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 8

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to funding for early education programs; establishing early education programs and a voluntary parent program; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to certification of teachers; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; establishing a teacher retention working group; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 19

SHORT TITLE: EXTEND SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/22/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/22/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/05/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/05/21	(S)	Heard & Held
02/05/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/15/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SJR 8

SHORT TITLE: COMPLETION OF UNIVERSITY LAND GRANT

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

02/03/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/03/21	(S)	EDC, RES
02/15/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 42

SHORT TITLE: VIRTUAL AND EARLY EDUCATION, READING

SPONSOR(s) : SENATOR(s) HUGHES

01/25/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/15/21
01/25/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/25/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/15/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 8

SHORT TITLE: PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING

SPONSOR(s) : SENATOR(s) BEGICH

01/22/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/22/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/15/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

ED KING, Staff
Senator Roger Holland
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained the committee substitute for SB 19.

KATIE BOTZ, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 19.

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Described the history of SJR 8.

CHAD HUTCHINSON, Director of State Relations
University of Alaska (UA)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Described the background for SJR 8.

ANDY HARRINGTON, Associate General Counsel
University of Alaska
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about SJR 8.

DAWSON MANN, Staff
Senator Shelley Hughes

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for SB 42.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:01:36 AM](#)

CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Micciche, Stevens, Begich, Hughes, and Chair Holland.

SB 19-EXTEND SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY

[9:02:09 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 19 "An Act extending the special education service agency; and providing for an effective date."

He stated his intent to adopt a committee substitute, take public testimony, and move the bill to the next committee of referral. He solicited a motion.

[9:02:25 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for SB 19, work order 32-LS0201\B, as the working document.

[9:02:33 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND objected for purposes of discussion.

[9:02:43 AM](#)

ED KING, Staff, Senator Roger Holland, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said the committee substitute makes one change on line 5. It changes the date from June 30, 2028, to June 30, 2029. That is the maximum extension allowed under AS 44.66.101.

[9:03:12 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND removed his objection. There being no further objection, Version B was before the committee. He opened public testimony on SB 19.

[9:03:54 AM](#)

KATIE BOTZ, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, said that when she was a girl being raised in Kodiak, her family found out that she is hearing impaired. She is profoundly deaf. She needed a lot of speech therapy in school in order to enunciate. For the longest time no one but her parents and teachers could

understand her. She spent years in speech therapy and became discouraged and wanted to quit, but her speech therapist with the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) kept encouraging her. She encouraged the committee to pass SB 19 and extend SESA so that kids can have a bright future and maybe they might testify in front of legislators when they are old enough.

[9:06:23 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE commented that it was a pleasure to hear from Ms. Botz. She is an amazing young woman.

[9:06:37 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES added that she is glad that Ms. Botz made it through speech therapy because her voice is important in the legislative process.

[9:07:06 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND closed public testimony on SB 19. He solicited a motion.

[9:07:28 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report the CS for SB 19, work order 32-LS0201\B, with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note.

CHAIR HOLLAND found objection and CSSB 19(EDC) was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[9:07:54 AM](#)

At ease

SJR 8-COMPLETION OF UNIVERSITY LAND GRANT

[9:09:51 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 8 Urging the Alaska delegation in Congress, the United States Department of the Interior, and the Governor to facilitate the completion of a land grant endowment to the University of Alaska.

He stated his intent to introduce the bill, hear invited testimony and public testimony and move the resolution to the next committee of referral. He asked the resolution sponsor Senator Stevens to introduce the resolution.

[9:10:20 AM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, speaking as sponsor, explained that SJR 8 asks the governor, the congressional delegation, and the Department of Interior to work together to complete the federal land grant endowment to the University of Alaska (UA). UA currently has one of the smallest holdings of all land grant institutions. The passage of this resolution will show strong support from the legislature to remedy UA's long-standing land grant deficit. He asked Mr. Lamkin to explain the details of SJR 8.

[9:10:56 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said the land grant status for UA has an interesting, if not underwhelming, history. It has been going on for the past century. The committee may note some incongruities in the way the "WHEREASES" in the resolution are structured, but the legislature could make any changes that might be necessary. He suggested that may be appropriate in the Resources Committee. This resolution is in alignment with the Board of Regents' resolution supporting this effort. The governor and congressional delegation are also aligned with this resolution. This sends Congress a message that the state is in support of finding a resolution to what is considered the university's land deficit.

[9:12:27 AM](#)

CHAD HUTCHINSON, Director of State Relations, University of Alaska (UA), Fairbanks, Alaska, said the University of Alaska system supports SJR 8 as it has historically done with similar resolutions in the past. He noted that Andy Harrington, the attorney for the UA system, was available to answer questions. He has submitted a PowerPoint presentation to the committee that gives the background of the land grant issue. The Board of Regents recently passed a resolution supporting the land grant. The university is working with the congressional delegation, so the federal government and the state are working together to ensure that the university receives its additional land grant entitlement.

[9:14:33 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE shared that he had been looking at the presentation. He asked if the resolution is correct on the total acreage.

MR. HUTCHINSON deferred to Mr. Harrington.

[9:15:13 AM](#)

ANDY HARRINGTON, Associate General Counsel, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, replied the university's estimate is that the land grant gap is 360,000 acres. That is what the university has been asking the federal delegation to specify in the bill.

SENATOR MICCICHE recalled that he saw 103,000 from the Land Grant College Act plus 250,000 from HB 130 in the 24th Legislature, which totals 353,000 acres.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked about the total acreage.

MR. HARRINGTON answered the calculation is based on the fact that 90,000 acres should have come with the Morrill Act of 1862 and another 270,000 acres that was unrealized under the Wickersham Act of 1915. He said he could provide more details, but those are the basics.

SENATOR MICCICHE said the resolution might be cross referenced to make sure the numbers are right. The senators will have another opportunity to look at that in another committee.

[9:17:20 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked if the Board of Regents resolution was unanimous.

MR. HUTCHINSON offered his understanding that it was unanimous.

MR. HARRINGTON agreed.

[9:18:03 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted that page 6 of the slide presentation indicates that the University of Texas received 2.1 million acres. She asked why UA got such a small chunk compared to the University of Texas considering the size of Alaska.

MR. HUTCHINSON replied that it is a matter of American history. Texas in 1867 was more of a frontier and trying to attract people. Alaska did not become a state until 1959. It is the evolution of American history of people moving west post 1830s.

SENATOR HUGHES shared that it just doesn't seem fair, especially since Alaska is 2.5 times the size of Texas. She asked what it would mean for revenue for the university if it were to receive the remaining acreage.

MR. HUTCHINSON responded that it depends on the ultimate land selection. A working group is focusing on specific land selection. Historically, there has been good revenue generated from leases. There are a plethora of resources. It depends on the ultimate acreage chosen.

[9:20:50 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked if there are competing interests for the land since there have been struggles with land grants since statehood. He asked how the university intends to go through the process of selecting lands to avoid litigation.

MR. HUTCHINSON replied there are many competing interests and litigation does occur. It may have to be settled via judicial process.

SENATOR BEGICH said he was a legislative staff member when the court said the legislature had to settle the mental health lands claims trust. It took the legislature years to settle that. He asked if the university has done anything about that because there will be competing claims. He assumes there is an ongoing process to ensure a minimum of litigation.

MR. HUTCHINSON said the working group discussion revolves around what land selection to make. Once there is an idea of the land selection then the outreach will commence to the relevant people. There is mental preparation for that. There are many lessons learned from the historical record with the land grant issue. There will be a more definitive answer once there is clarity about what the acreage will be.

[9:23:59 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND opened public testimony on SJR 8; finding none, he closed public testimony on SJR 8.

[9:24:27 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said the goal is to make UA as self-sufficient as possible so that it takes less from general funds. Senator Hughes made an interesting point in comparing Texas to Alaska. Texas has generated \$21.4 billion. Alaska has generated \$6.8 million. The legislature wants a good strong university that is as self-sufficient as possible. If and when this occurs, it will help the university grow into the future.

[9:25:23 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND asked the will of the committee.

[9:25:34 AM](#)

At ease

[9:25:50 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report SJR 8 from committee with individual recommendations.

CHAIR HOLLAND found no objection and SJR 8 was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[9:26:14 AM](#)

At ease

SB 42-VIRTUAL AND EARLY EDUCATION, READING

[9:28:25 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 42 "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to course credit for students; relating to annual reports regarding school district performance and school district employees; relating to school age eligibility; relating to funding for early education programs; establishing early education programs and a voluntary parent program; relating to the duties and powers of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to school operating fund reserves; relating to certification of teachers; relating to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission; relating to a virtual education consortium; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; establishing a teacher retention working group; and providing for an effective date."

He stated his intent to introduce the bill and hold it for further review. He invited Senator Hughes and staff to the table.

[9:28:57 AM](#)

SENATOR SHELLEY HUGHES, speaking as sponsor of SB 42, said the bill seeks to close the achievement gap. Alaska has had a large achievement gap for too many years with some of the lowest reading scores, graduation rates, and test results in the nation. This has put Alaska students in a poor position nationally and globally. There are recognize pockets of excellence sprinkled throughout the state and some fine teachers, but far too many students are far behind. The state

can do better and it has an obligation to do better and for the sake of its youth, it must do better.

9:30:06 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said the goal of the bill is to improve schools and increase academic outcomes in all grades by providing tools and incentives to districts and the department to improve instruction and reduce administrative costs. Guided by the principle that every Alaskan student matters, SB 42 takes steps toward positive transformation of the education system in Alaska to better meet the needs of students in the 21st century, with a special focus on grades K-3. The bill will first require district focus and accountability on K-3 reading instruction to ensure students are fluent readers by fourth grade in order to increase their success and achievement in all subject areas in the remaining grades and beyond high school. The bill requires school districts to use proven and effective literacy teaching methods and provide intensive reading intervention in partnership with parents and families. The goal is that students will master objectives at each grade level prior to promotion to the next grade.

SENATOR HUGHES said the bill will also create the Alaska Virtual Education Consortium to allow districts to offer high quality virtual education courses through an online database to students in other districts for a fee. The consortium will also conduct teacher training, including specific instruction for conducting and creating engaging online delivery. Students will gain access to great teachers through this consortium and to a wider variety of course offerings as districts choose to participate. SB 42 will require the state board to periodically adjust the minimum score needed to pass the Praxis exam for teachers so that Alaska has the highest testing standards for teaching certification among the 50 states.

9:31:59 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said SB 42 will provide recognition to the best teachers through a greater acknowledgment of those who are Nationally Board Certified. It provides districts an opportunity to increase the carry forward limit of the unreserved fund balance from 10 to 25 percent. That would not include any savings derived from a cooperative arrangement grant. The bill requires various reporting to increase transparency and accountability. One example is that there would be transparency for reading proficiency, so that parents know what is happening with their students. It is also important for the public to be aware of overall academic progress of schools. Another new item

is the ratio of administrators to the number of students and the number of administrative staff to teachers would be reported. And of course, everyone is interested in knowing the district ratio of teachers to students.

[9:33:34 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said the state, which means "we the people," spends \$1.6 billion each year on K-12 education. "Let's make sure we're getting the bang for our buck and that districts are held accountable but most importantly, that our students are achieving academic success for that \$1.6 billion," she said. She invited her aide to present the sectional.

[9:34:04 AM](#)

DAWSON MANN, Staff, Senator Shelley Hughes, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 42.

Sec. 1 - Page 2, Lines 1-4

Establishes this Act as the Alaska Reading and Virtual Education Act

Sec. 2 - Page 2, Lines 5-9

This section adds intent language related to districts adopting policies to limit student-to teaching-staff ratios for grades K-3.

Sec. 3- Page 2 Lines 10-25

This section adds uncodified law for legislative findings regarding virtual education, education spending, quality teachers, and classroom instruction.

Sec. 4- 14.03.060(e) Page 2, Lines 26-31, Page 3, Lines 1-5

This section establishes that schools include an early education program approved or supervised by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

Sec. 5 - AS 14.03.072(a) Page 3, Lines 6-15

This section adds to AS 14.30.765(a), reading intervention services in addition to intervention strategies for early literacy.

[9:35:41 AM](#)

MR. MANN explained that Sections 6 and 7 are the same. This section makes conforming changes because of the new subsection,

AS 14.03.073(e), regarding course credits for certain qualifying activities outside of school hours.

Sec. 6 - AS 14.03.073(a) Page 3, Lines 16-22

This section makes conforming changes on account of the addition of the new subsection AS 14.03.073(e).

Sec. 7- AS 14.03.073(b) Page 3, Lines 23-29

This section makes conforming changes on account of the addition of the new subsection AS 14.03.073(e).

Sec. 8 - AS 14.03.073 Page 3, Lines 30-31, Page 4, Lines 1-6

This section adds a new subsection (e), requiring school districts to allow course credit for career and technical education, physical education, music, or art classes for an activity, including a cultural activity, outside of school hours that meets the educational or physical activity requirements of the course.

Sec. 9 - AS 14.03.078(a) Page 4, Lines 7-31, Page 5, Lines 1-17

This section adds a requirement that the Department of Education and Early Development provided districts with the same annual report that is provided to the legislature and outlines the content of the reports.

Sec. 10- AS 14.03.078 Page 5, Lines 18-25

This section adds a new subsection, requiring each school district to post the portion of the report that pertains to the school district for the public on the district's or community's website or through another easily accessible method. Defines the term "administrative employee".

Sec. 11- AS 14.03.080(d) Page 5, Lines 26-31

This section amends AS 14.03.080(d) by changing the date a student is eligible to enter kindergarten to June 1st of the preceding year and establishes an eligibility waiver process.

MR. MANN noted that the current eligibility date is September 1.

Sec. 12- AS 14.03.080 Page 6, Lines 1-4

This section mends AS 14.03.080 by adding new subsection (g) which changes the date a child is eligible to enter a public early education program.

Sec. 13 - AS 14.03.120 Page 6, Lines 5-31

This section amends AS 14.03.120 by adding new subsection (h) which establishes annual reporting requirements for school districts regarding student performance metrics in grades K-3.

Sec. 14 - AS 14.03 Page 7, Lines 1-31, Page 8, Lines 1-31, Page 9, Lines 1-31

This section creates AS14.03.410 which codifies a statewide pre-K program, providing a stairstep, three-year grant program to provide training and assistance to school districts in developing their local pre-K program. Over six fiscal years, which all school districts are offered the opportunity to participate. AS 14.03.420 establishes a Parents as Teachers program within DEED and establishes criteria for demonstrating efficiency of the program.

Sec. 15- AS 14.07.020(a) Page 10, Lines 1-31, Page 11, Lines 1-31, Page 12, Lines 1-17

This section amends AS 14.07.020(a) and directs the department to supervise all early education programs, approve those early education programs established under AS 14.03.410, establishes a new reading program, AS 14.07.065, and reading intervention programs of participating schools, AS 14.30.770.

Sec. 16 - AS 14.07.020(c) Page 12, Lines 18-21

This section amends AS 14.07.020(c) to define an "early education program" as a pre-K program for students three to five years old if its primary function is educational.

[9:40:11 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said the provision in Section 16 is often a source of confusion and he wanted to erase that confusion. He explained that a prior section defined kids eligible for early education programs at four years old, whereas Section 16 says three to five. It appears to be inconsistent, but it actually ensures that programs like Head Start and other early education programs will not be affected by the definition. It is an anomaly of state law that requires the numbers be different. This is consistent with state law.

MR. MANN continued the sectional.

Sec. 17 - AS 14.07.050 Page 12, Lines 22-31, Page 13, Line 1

This section amends AS 14.07.050 to allow the department to supply supplemental reading textbooks and materials related to intervention services established under AS 14.30.765 and AS 14.30.770.

Sec. 18- AS 14.07.165(a) Page 13, Lines 2-31, Page 14, Lines 1-6

This section amends AS 14.07.165(a), relating to the duties of the state Board of Education and Early Development, by adding to those duties a requirement to establish regulations for pre-K standards and pre-K teacher certification requirements.

[9:41:55 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said the legislature debated similar language in a prior legislative session and modified the language after extensively hearing from superintendents, parents, and teachers. He hasn't had a chance to compare this language to the language that he, the commissioner, and the governor settled on. He asked if the language is the same as what came out of the committee a year ago.

SENATOR HUGHES replied that it was pulled from his previous SB 6, but she would need to follow up with which version of that bill.

SENATOR BEGICH said that the descriptive language couldn't work in some communities in its original form so the committee found a way to adjust the language. If this becomes the education vehicle, he will ask her to consider any adjustments or changes to reflect that effort to define how to do the quality pre-kindergarten program.

[9:43:50 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES responded that she and Mr. Mann went through the bill page by page. She confessed that she realized there were areas that were not lifted from the right version for different aspects. The virtual education piece was an earlier version. She said she would like to sit down with the chair and his staff and the commissioner to correct discrepancies, so that they have things that will actually work.

[9:44:38 AM](#)

MR. MANN continued the sectional.

Sec. 19- AS 14.17.500 Page 14, Lines 7-10

This section amends AS 14.17.500 by adding new subsection (d) that establishes an early education student shall be counted in the school district's average daily membership (ADM) as a half day student once the early education program has been approved by the department.

Sec. 20- AS 14.17.505(a) Page 14, Lines 11-18

This section amends AS 14.17. 505(a) to increase the limit that a school district is allowed to retain in its unreserved fund balance from 10% to 25% of district expenditures. This section also allows for savings realized from a cooperative grant under AS 14.14.115 to not count towards the 25% limit.

[9:45:44 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS referenced Section 19 and asked what the current practice is for including half-day students.

[9:46:00 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES responded that she would like to defer all of the questions about pre-K to Senator Begich.

[9:46:21 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH answered that currently they are not counted as an equivalent student at all. The long-term idea incorporated in Senator Hughes' bill and the former SB 6 and SB 8 is that at a certain point they will be counted as one-half of a full-time equivalent, whether it is a full-time or half-time pre-K program. They will only be counted as one-half.

[9:46:50 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND stated that Senator Begich is very aware of the first part of SB 42 and will probably contribute many good comments during the sectional analysis.

[9:47:09 AM](#)

MR. MANN continued the sectional.

Sec. 21- AS 14.17.905(a) Page 14, Lines 19-31, Page 15, Lines 1-4

This section amends AS 14.17.905(a) to include students in early education programs approved by the department in the definition of an elementary school.

Sec. 22- AS 14.17.905 Page 15, Lines 5-9

This section amends AS 14.17.905 by adding new subsection (d) to avoid letting school districts count pre-K students twice in Foundation Formula ADM calculations.

Sec. 23- AS 14.20.010 Page 15, Lines 10-16

This section amends AS 14.20.010 by adding that public schools must prominently display names of national board-certified teachers. The section also outlines the 2025 four percent national board certification goal for the state and further clarifies that "national board certification" means certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Sec. 24- AS 14.20.015(c) Page 15, Lines 17-26

This amends AS 14.20.015(c) to ensure teaching certificate reciprocity for teachers moving to Alaska from out-of-state and adds that such teachers must complete at least three credits or equivalency in evidence-based reading instruction to be eligible for an Alaska teaching endorsement in elementary education.

Sec. 25- AS 14.20.020(i) Page 15, Lines 27-31, Page 16, Lines 1-11

This section amends AS 14.20.020(i) require the State School Board to periodically adjust the minimum score needed to pass the Praxis exam to be equal or higher than the most stringent established in other states.

Sec. 26- AS 14.20.020 Page 16, Lines 12-18

This section amends AS 14.20.020 by adding new subsection (l) that requires all teachers to complete at least three credits or equivalency in evidence-based reading instruction to be eligible for an endorsement in elementary education.

Sec. 27- AS 14.20.380 Page 16, Lines 19-21

This section adds a new subsection to require DEED to provide administrative support services to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC).

Sec. 28- AS 14.20.460 Page 16, Lines 22-31, Page 17, Lines 1-4

This section amends AS 14.20.460 to require the PTPC to use administrative support services provided by DEED.

Sec. 29- AS 14.30 Page 17, Lines 5-31, Page 18, Lines 1-31, Page 19, Lines 1-31, Page 20, Lines 1-31, Page 21, Lines 1-31, Page 22, Lines 1-31, Page 23, Lines 1-31, Page 24, Lines 1- 31, Page 25, Lines 1-31, Page 26, Lines 1-31, Page 27, Lines 1-31, Page 28, Line 1

This section establishes Article 15, Reading Intervention Programs.

Establishes AS 14.30.760, which directs the department to establish a statewide reading assessment and screening tool to identify students with reading deficiencies and establishes timeline in which assessments are conducted.

Establishes AS 14.30.765, which directs each school district to offer intensive reading intervention services to K-3 students exhibiting a reading deficiency. Services must be implemented in a manner to include communication between teachers, parents, administrators, and the student.

Establishes AS 14.30.770, which directs the department to establish a statewide reading program, specifically to assist school districts in a variety of ways to affect the reading intervention services described in AS 14.30.665, above. This section also outlines the use of support reading staff in schools.

AS 14.30.775 aligns use of the word "district" in this Act with the definitions given elsewhere in statute when referring to a school district.

Sec. 30- AS 14.30.765(c) Page 28, Lines 2-30

This section establishes that a district or school must provide parental notification of a student's literacy deficiency and establishes guidelines for what information must be provided within the notification.

**Sec. 31- AS 14.30.765(e) Page 28, Line 1, Page 29,
Lines 1-9**

This section establishes that a student must demonstrate sufficient reading skills exhibited by sufficient standardized reading assessments or reading portfolio review by grade three to progress to grade four.

[9:52:08 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH commented on substituting the word "must" instead of "should" in Section 30 and Section 31. He asked if the intent is to mandate retention.

SENATOR HUGHES responded that the bill would still provide for a waiver. One of the discussions with the commissioner was about adjusting it so that a parent could sign something if the parent was insistent that the student go on to next grade, even if the child is not ready for it. This would be a possible amendment. In signing the waiver, the parent would agree to a certain number of hours of intervention before the next fall. It does mean a child will only be promoted if the child has mastered objectives, but there is waiver for students who have disabilities or who have had two years of reading intervention. There are several ways there can be exemptions.

SENATOR BEGICH said the waivers sound similar to what was in the prior iteration of SB 6 from last year.

SENATOR HUGHES answered that she thought those exemptions were in SB 6.

SENATOR BEGICH said that she provided substantial background data, one of which does refer to retention. He would like to discuss those more fully with Senator Hughes off the record to flesh out what retention does or does not do if Senator Hughes is willing.

[9:54:32 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES replied yes. One thing that was incorporated was setting it back four years before retention kicks in. A student entering kindergarten would have the benefit being in school through third grade before this requirement of mastering the objectives kicks in. Teachers and districts would have a chance to get really good at reading intervention. States that have done that have not seen an increase in retention rates. States that have put the promotion policy in place in year one do see

an increase, so the requirement would be set back four years to avoid that.

[9:55:51 AM](#)

MR. MANN continued the sectional.

Sec. 32- AS 14.30 Page 29, Lines 10-31, Page 30, Lines 1-31, Page 31, Lines 1-19

This section creates a new section titled "Virtual Education Consortium" which also creates a new article titled "Article 15. Virtual Education". The subsections of AS 14.30.760 are as follows:

- Subsection (a) establishes the virtual education consortium under DEED. The consortium will have a database of virtual education courses available to all districts for students in grades 6-12. The consortium will also provide training for teachers instructing in virtual settings and professional development for all teachers in the state. A school district or third-party vendor may offer courses on the database if it is approved by DEED.

[9:56:44 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted that this section is not lifted from the most recent version. This says grades 6-12. She would hope the committee would be amenable to changing it to all grades.

[9:57:14 AM](#)

MR. MANN continued with the sectional:

- Subsection (b) will require DEED to review each course to ensure it meets state standards and is appropriate for students in grades 6-12. This subsection also requires that each course has the following information: the title, subject, and description of the course, the district providing the course, method of virtual education delivery, samples of the curriculum, a video introduction by the instructor, and if a synchronous course, a video of the instructor teaching.
- Subsection (c) requires the consortium to provide training for teachers before they are allowed to teach a course that is included in the database. A waiver may be granted if the consortium finds

that the teacher has the experience and skills necessary to teach in a virtual setting.

- Subsection (d) requires that the consortium provide professional development courses for all teachers in the state. Any district that has adequate broadband access to participate in the trainings shall require its teachers to participate in any necessary trainings. The consortium may also require participating districts to adopt the same in-service days for training.
- Subsection (e) sets a fee structure for students that take a course offered virtually by a school district that is not the student's home district. The student's district shall calculate the fee by multiplying the base student allocation by the proportion of classes that the student is taking in the district offering the virtual course. The student's district shall pay this fee to the district offering the course.
- In subsection (f), establishes a fee to any school district that offers a course in the database under (b) of this section. DEED will be able to set the fee in regulation and can adjust it as necessary annually. The fees must be approximately equal any administrative costs of the consortium.
- Subsection (g) allows the consortium to require districts that provide courses or have students taking courses through the consortium to adopt a shared calendar and a shared bell schedule for at least a portion of the school day.
- Subsection (h) creates definitions for the terms: "asynchronous", "base student allocation", "blended", "host district", "synchronous", and "virtual education" or "virtual instruction".

Sec. 33- AS 47.17.290(12) Page 31, Lines 20-25

This section directs early education program staff to be included in those organizations required to report evidence of child abuse.

Sec. 34- AS 14.30.765(f) Page 31, Line 26

This section establishes a repeal date of July 1, 2025

Sec. 35- AS 14.20.010(c) Page 31, Line 27

This section establishes a repeal date of July 1, 2027.

Sec. 36- AS 14.03.410 Page 31, Line 28

This section establishes a repeal date of July 1, 2032

Sec. 37- Page 31, Lines 29-31, Page 32, Lines 1-23

This section creates uncodified law by adding a new section regarding: Teacher Retention Working Group, to review challenges to teacher retention in Alaska and outlines the membership of that group.

[10:00:27 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH disclosed that his wife is an advisor on the Teacher Retention Working Group that was established by the department. He said the second point is that this may not need an expiration because from his discussions with the commissioner, he knows that the group has moved forward and is getting ready to report on its findings. This may end up being redundant and probably will need to be removed from this and SB 8.

[10:01:26 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she discussed that yesterday with Mr. Mann and they had a note to ask the commissioner whether this is still needed.

[10:01:40 AM](#)

MR. MANN said that in Section 37 the working group also has to make recommendations for solutions to the retention issue. He continued the sectional.

Sec. 38- Page 32, Lines 24-28

This section creates uncodified law by adding a new section regarding: Virtual Education Availability Deadline of this Act on or before July 1, 2021.

Sec. 39- Page 32, Lines 29-31, Page 33, Lines 1-5

This section creates uncodified law by adding a new section regarding: Applicability language, relating to endorsements in elementary education issued on or after the effective date of this act.

Sec. 40- Page 33, Lines 6-11

This section creates uncodified law by adding a new section regarding transition language, directing the department to use 2019-20 school accountability

rankings for purposes of determining the first cohort of lowest performing schools, to identify their pre-K grant eligibility for FY 22.

Sec. 41- Page 33, Lines 12-13

This section provides for an effective date for sections 20, 25, 27, 28, 32 and 38 of this Act take immediate effect under AS 01.10.070 (c).

Sec. 42- Page 33, Line 14

This section provides for an effective date for sections 30 and 31 of this Act to take effect on July 1, 2025.

Sec. 43- Page 33, Lines 15-16

Provides for an effective date, except as provided in sections 41 and 42 of this Act, this Act take effect July 1, 2021.

[10:03:38 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE asked if the committee could get an explanation on the logic of the repeal and effective date as those dates are more complicated than typical.

SENATOR HUGHES answered certainly.

MR. MANN added that Section 34 has a repeal date for the National Board Certification goal and Section 36 has the repeal date for the grant program.

SENATOR MICCICHE said there is obviously a logic to the effective and repeal dates and perhaps an explanation of one page would be sufficient.

[10:04:56 AM](#)

SENATOR HOLLAND asked if he was referring to the actions in Sections 41-43.

SENATOR MICCICHE replied there are a half dozen or so dates. Committees often breeze through those and he intends to start looking at those more carefully. Typically a sponsor has a logic as to why a bill steps in and out at different stages.

SENATOR HUGHES responded that the promotion policy will not kick in until after four years and a student has had the opportunity to complete grades K-3. During those four years, she wanted to incentivize schools to improve. Once the promotion policy kicks

in, the four-year incentive program would go away because schools will be motivated to have successful students. That is an example of the sponsor's logic.

10:06:14 AM

SENATOR STEVENS commented that this is very comprehensive with so many good things. In Section 26, the bill is asking teachers to get an endorsement. He wants to make sure that the three-credit class or equivalency is readily available. He asked who will be offering that, would it be online, and would it be accessible for teachers who are in the bush. He asked Senator Hughes to flesh out how the state will help teachers get that class.

10:07:06 AM

SENATOR HUGHES responded that she had that very conversation with the University of Alaska (UA) Interim President Pat Pitney last week because UA does provide reading instruction but it will have to meet certain criteria. There could be a working group to make sure that UA will have a course that is science-based and evidence-based, as specified in the bill. President Pitney thought UA may have something already, but Senator Hughes thinks it might need to be fleshed out to meet the criteria in the bill.

10:07:56 AM

SENATOR STEVENS commented that it is not intended to be easy; it is an academic class that will help teachers do their job better. He wanted to be sure that it will not be difficult for teachers to get that course.

10:08:17 AM

SENATOR BEGICH said Section 26 was discussed last year. It may be identical language. There are a number of ways a teacher may certify. This sets a tone. The commissioner spoke to this last year. The legislature doesn't want to create an inconvenience for teachers, but the legislature wants to make sure teachers have the background. This is something that would work for teachers; it wouldn't just be through the university. One good thing about the bill is that it approaches all these topics as part of a continuum. It does not look at issues in isolation. It is important to recognize that the education of kids does not happen in isolation. When the legislature addresses one topic at a time, the legislature does not get across the line. This bill recognized that early education cannot succeed without a competent reading program. He may not agree with all the details, but the continuum is important. It points that a

competent reading program will not work if kids are not prepared to engage in that program. A delay of up to four years points to the importance of teachers being up to speed and able to provide that program. The bill has a consistency that is similar to the consistency to SB 8. This goes further in including virtual education and some other components, such as the fund balance issue. He commends the sponsor for acknowledging the continuum. The sponsor's material speaks to the importance of pre-K. Denmark and Finland are cited in the material provided. Nearly 100 percent of kids in Denmark and Finland have gone through high-quality early education. Kids in Finland enter school later, but virtually all of the kids in that country have early education. In Sweden, 94 percent have early education and in Australia it is 90 percent. These are all fundamental points about how prekindergarten, reading, and success are connected. SENATOR BEGICH commended the sponsor for bringing the bill forward and being willing to work with the committee to make it a bill that will work for everyone.

[10:11:44 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND held SB 42 in committee.

[10:11:58 AM](#)

At ease

SB 8-PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING

[10:12:41 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 8 "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to funding for early education programs; establishing early education programs and a voluntary parent program; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to certification of teachers; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; establishing a teacher retention working group; and providing for an effective date."

He stated his intention to introduce and hold the bill in committee. He invited sponsor Senator Begich to introduce his bill.

[10:13:04 AM](#)

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, speaking as sponsor of SB 8, stated that he would hold the sectional analysis until the next hearing.

10:13:24 AM

At ease

10:13:38 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting.

10:13:40 AM

SENATOR BEGICH explained that what the committee would hear was not dissimilar from what they heard from Senator Hughes. He asked the committee to read his sponsor statement, which focuses more on the early learning components. In late 2019, he began to work with the commissioner [of the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)] and the governor to address reading. The committee has often discussed the state's reading scores. Senator Stevens and Senator Hughes and others have been driven by a desire to improve outcomes. In his discussions with the commissioner, he recognized early on that this relationship existed between reading and prekindergarten. That relationships led himself, the commissioner, and the governor to sit down at one point and identify the principles they believed needed to be in a successful education bill if the state were to truly turn the curve. A lot of that was built on the prior work of Senator Stevens and Senator Hughes.

10:15:19 AM

SENATOR BEGICH said the three principles are 1) high-quality, voluntary early education, 2) high-quality reading, and 3) substantive support from DEED to ensure that teachers are prepped and ready and the districts have the support to succeed. All of this led to a comprehensive amount of research to identify what programming worked best out there. They looked at Mississippi, Florida, Colorado, and Oklahoma. They tried to draw the best of the best in a collaborative effort. Last year, the committee had seven hearings. The prior chair said thank goodness it is Valentine's Day. May they finally show the love to this bill and move it out, and the committee did. The committee did it thoughtfully, not hastily. The committee included almost everything suggested. The committee listened to superintendents, teachers, education experts, the education association, and the Alaska Policy Forum. The committee listened to all the voices in between. Not everyone was satisfied with the final product that came out of the committee, but everyone recognized that a final product cannot be perfect for everyone. It was not a bipartisan bill; it was a nonpartisan bill. The

difference is that a bipartisan bill takes one political opinion and another political opinion and mashes them both up and comes out with a piece of mud in the middle that is often reflective of the worst, not the best, of an effort. A nonpartisan bill does the opposite. It creates a consortium of ideas, taking the best from either side, putting partisanship aside. This bill does that. It takes a nonpartisan approach to education based on evidence and moves that forward.

10:17:42 AM

SENATOR BEGICH said SB 8 and SB 42 both take a nonpartisan approach to putting forward good, consistent education policy. If the committee or this body passes policy that makes them feel good for a moment, it doesn't solve the problem for generations of children. It does the opposite. It sets them up for failure not just of opportunity but of expectation. With that in mind, SB 8 does not have as many items as SB 42. It focuses strictly on the prekindergarten connection to reading, how those work together with support from the Department of Education and Early Development, how it provides support to teachers, and how it was developed with all those elements in mind. His hope is that the committee will see the wisdom of putting these ideas together in a common bill that the entire committee can support and that supports all of the elements that he is describing. If the committee doesn't do that, he thinks it will be a mistake. He is open to finding a process that works for everyone at this table and in this legislature, and for the children and their parents.

10:19:20 AM

SENATOR STEVENS said both bills are extremely important. Years ago he was involved in a Chamber of Commerce project to help adults who cannot read. The committee would be amazed by the number of adults who have difficulty reading. It is so unfair to not help children learn to read. The committee has to make sure that these waivers make sense. This is life threatening and life enhancing. People who can't read will have problems their entire lives. They will have lower incomes and be in prison more. He hopes they address that very seriously and not just let children be socially advanced. The committee should do the best it can to make sure every child reads at level.

10:20:43 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE shared that when he arrived in the legislature eight years ago, the partisan difference was that one party thought if the reading issue was not faced head on, it would solve itself. The other party was education at whatever the cost may be. He has seen the two sides come together, which is

amazing. The evolution has been productive. Now a conservative group like the Alaska Policy Forum is saying the state is ranked dead last in the nation in fourth grade reading. That is a fact and that is not good for anyone. He has four kids and one had a reading problem. The reading intervention from the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District was significant and turned her life around quickly. He saw a significant difference in her capacity to be successful in other subjects as well. Senator Hughes talks about pockets of success. His hope for this process is that even though they got one bill across the finish line in the Senate last year, the committee will spend time with successful districts to see what is and is not working. Perhaps the committee can put something together to move the state from beyond dead last after all these years. Money doesn't do it. Senator Begich is right, just pouring money into it doesn't deliver results. Senator Hughes has put a lot of thought into what can be successful as well. He continued to say:

What we do know is we're lagging and will continue to lag if we don't find the sweet spot. It doesn't matter the party, doesn't matter the approach, it has to be the right one. I am excited about working through this. I do know that being a dad of some pretty amazing kids, every child is different. It doesn't matter how intelligent they may be if they don't have the right intervention when they're running into a problem, they're going to fall behind and stay there and I hope whatever bill comes out of this committee can help solve that problem.

10:23:40 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND held SB 8 in committee.

10:24:00 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 10:24 a.m.